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New York Congressional members push for gas drilling disclosure

Fracking chemicals guarded by companies

BY BRIAN TUMULTY • WASHINGTON BUREAU • JANUARY 13, 2011, 5:55 PM

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WASHINGTON -- Nine members of the New York congressional delegation are among House Democrats urging federal officials to require natural gas drillers to disclose the chemicals they use under a technique called hydraulic fracturing.

Interior Secretary Ken Salazar announced in November that his agency, which oversees natural gas and oil drilling on public lands, is reviewing its regulations.

Although Interior mostly oversees public lands west of the Mississippi and a new federal disclosure requirement would only apply to those locations, it would effectively eliminate the secrecy claimed by major drillers around the country.

An estimated 90 percent of the drilling leases Interior has issued over the last 10 years have been for hydraulic fracturing wells, in which drillers pump chemicals, sand and water into the ground to break open rock formations and release natural gas trapped in fissures.

New York is a prime candidate for hydraulic fracturing because it's home to the Marcellus Shale, a vast geological formation that stretches from Western New York and the Southern Tier into Pennsylvania, West Virginia, eastern Ohio, part of Maryland and the western edge of Virginia.

New York has a moratorium on new drilling leases as it reviews the potential environmental impact of widespread hydrofracking in areas adjacent to the Finger Lakes, the Chesapeake watershed and the New York City reservoir system.

Last September, Wyoming began requiring that gas drillers disclose the proprietary chemicals they use for hydrofracking. Drillers that refuse, citing trade secrets, still must give the information to state officials so they can decide whether an

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to state officials so they can decide whether an exemption is justified.

Efforts by congressional Democrats to enact new restrictions on hydraulic fracturing stalled in the last Congress. They originally wanted to amend the [Safe Drinking Water Act](#) to require drillers to disclose their chemicals but agreed to a compromise that called for the Environmental Protection Agency to study the issue.

With the Republican-controlled House unlikely to pursue legislation, 46 House Democrats sent a letter Thursday to Salazar, urging the Obama administration to issue new regulations.

New Yorkers who signed the letter include Reps. Maurice Hinchey, D-Hurley, Nita Lowey, D-Harrison and Eliot Engel, D-Bronx.

Maurice Hinchey, D-Hurley, Nita Lowey, D-Harrison and Eliot Engel, D-Bronx.

Hinchey, who helped spearhead the letter, acknowledged that no Republican lawmakers supported the request.

"We couldn't find any who wanted to sign it," Hinchey said.

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